Section: Literature and Philosophy Round Table: D'Alembert and the Encyclopedia

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J.A.G. Roberts, University of Huddersfield, England

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Diderot marvelled that the Chinese written language had not been simplified and considered Chinese drama to be imperfect. In PEINTURE Jaucourt said Chinese painting imitative and lacking genius. In TOUR DE PORCELAINE Jaucourt made disparaging remarks about the Porcelain Tower outside Nanking. Chinese applied arts better treated. Articles on artificial flowers (FLEURISTE ARTIFICIEL), on Chinese paper (PAPIER DE LA CHINE) and above all on porcelain. Jaucourt and d'Holbach interested in manufacturing porcelain of similar quality in Europe.

Conclusion

The entries show little consistency. In the early volumes Diderot's authorship of CHINOIS, PHILOSOPHIE DES gave some editorial direction and a comprehensive coverage of some topics. But many discrepancies in the romanisation of Chinese terms and disrespectful treatment of things Chinese, e.g. the articles LI and JU. Many comments reinforced current stereotypes relating to China and the Chinese, some contradicted travellers' tales. Some of the admiration for the government and the ethical code remained, but this overshadowed by the sceptical tone adopted by Diderot, d'Holbach and Jaucourt. They used the Chinese examples to criticise Europe, but their interest in technology and progress also led them to disparage China as a country which had achieved notable things in the past, but which was now surpassed by Europe.